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EDU 402

Background Statement

For quite some time now I’ve wanted to be a teacher, it probably all started when I was in middle school. As I shuffled from class to class with my backpack slung rebelliously across a single shoulder, the one constant in each and every single room were quality teachers who genuinely seemed to care about their students and preparing them to be successful later on in their lives. And so, it probably would not be truthful if I said they had nothing to do with inspiring me to become a teacher today.

Looking back at my career as a student both my teachers and the administration seemed to expect the students to have a well-rounded education, with courses in the fine arts, and a variety of team sports that had escaped the budget chopping block there was always something any student could find exciting or become passionate about. Standards never seemed like the targeted goal of the administration, more a holistic approach to learning and education that could result in some rather esoteric courses appearing in the course catalog at the end of every semester. Although, often times teachers would not be able to generate enough interest in these classes, and they would end up cancelled because of low enrollment, leaving those teachers to add another core curriculum class to their roster instead.

For the most part my parents were very supportive in their expectations of my brother and I. They would have been happy with whatever choices I made in school. Although, their support likely hinged on my choices leading me to college and some job that required a bachelor’s degree at the very least. Their desire for me to attended college probably had quite a lot to do with them developing as parents at a time where it was thought that in order to be happy and successful one needed to first attend college and come out the other side with a diploma. These feelings do not really come as a surprise, as it was the prevailing opinion at the time when I was attending high school. All of the faculty seemed to adopt a similar stance that the business world had sold to them, that I absolutely needed a college education. Though since selling things is their forte, it makes perfect sense that schools would also run with the idea.

My own expectations were most likely a result of that environment, I grew up expecting to go to college, and never really considered any alternative. Now that I am older though I am much more appreciative of the opportunity I have been given to attend a university, and have become considerable proud of that accomplishment.

The classes were mostly set up in a standard grid with each student sitting in their own individual desk and chair. Occasionally, one of my teachers would have the class rearrange themselves into some other pattern that encouraged presentations or group work. Some of my teachers, usually my favorites, typically had some other kind of configuration that complimented their teaching strategy, which would help to hammer their instruction in and reinforce our learning. These teachers would almost always present their students with a specifically tailored and student-centered method of instruction. I was usually most successful when our teachers would allow our class to discuss our assignment or reading together in class, while they served as a facilitator who kept us on track. The class would then together discuss the material and put together our own impressions and thoughts to create a more broad and detailed understanding of our instruction.

Most instruction from any of my teachers would be able to take hold, not always because they were especially effective teachers, but because I developed into a prominently verbal and linguistic learner, so instruction that even an ineffectual teacher prepared for me would result in a successful learning experience. I can remember struggling through several unprepared teacher’s courses in high school and middle school. Despite their less than ideal instruction I was still able to develop a solid understanding of whatever it was they were trying to teach. This would usually leave a considerable number to my completely competent classmates to fall behind. My desk would then become a popular destination during study halls or free time where I helped supplement our teacher’s instruction.

Throughout my high school experience it was plain that the students I attended school with came from modest families. My school was situated in a rural area, about an hour from Portland, while there were some pockets within our community, most students came from families where neither parent held a college degree, and the economic climate of our community reflected that. Since many families did not possess parents with any kind of higher education their children were not expected to work towards one either. This being the case my school experienced far less than stellar testing scores in every conceivable standardized test. School simply was not a priority for a large portion of our class, this certainly does not mean that they were not able to lead happy and productive lives, but for most college was never an expectation or something they felt was a possibility.

Most of my classes in high school were on the honors or AP track with the exception of math. Now that I have a much more developed understanding of education I am fairly certain that I convinced myself that I could not be successful with mathematics rather than seeing it as a challenge that I needed to overcome, just because it did not come as easily or naturally as all of my other courses. After graduating from high school I attended a prep school for a year before going to Farmington. My math teacher there himself was fresh out of school and had majored in theater production and stage management, it had been years since he had done any complicated math, so he had to figure out or remember everything we went over in class as he taught the material to us. For whatever the reason everything seemed to click and I was able to take the instruction and apply it to the tests and homework in a way that I had not previously been able to do.

Unfortunately, I cannot really see my background helping me as a social studies teacher. History, geography, economics, and the numerous other subjects that can be found under the umbrella of social studies all came very naturally to me. I never experienced growing up without new clothes at the beginning of each year or food in the cupboards when I was hungry. My parents always took an interest in how my day went and what I learned in school, they always insisted in looking over my homework every night despite exasperated assurances suggesting otherwise. Much of the reason social studies came so naturally to me though was likely because of the passion and enthusiasm I brought with me to each class. I genuinely cared about what I was learning and want to bring that same passion into my classroom each day. As a social studies teacher what I really hope to be able to bring to the classroom is a detailed understanding of the world directly surrounding my students, along with the extended world. While I know I cannot expect my students to read the newspaper and watch the news every night, one of my primary goals as a teacher is to get my students to have a working understanding of the current social and political issues that our country is wrapped up in. I consider an understanding of these topics to be entirely critical to live in and participate in a democracy that functions smoothly and as it should. Staying uninformed about the trajectory of our nation can only send us, as an entire country off course and prevent us from righting ourselves.